

LAUNCH AND FIRST MEETING OF THE APFNet INTERIM STEERING COMMITTEE

Xinhai Jinjiang Hotel
Beijing, China
1 June 2011

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Opening session

Mr. Qu Guilin, Director General of the Department of International Cooperation, State Forestry Administration (SFA), welcomed participants to the inaugural meeting of APFNet's interim Interim Steering Committee. He introduced Ms. Yin Hong, Vice Minister of SFA, and invited her to make opening remarks.

Ms. Yin Hong extended a warm welcome to all participants and expressed her sincere gratitude, especially to those who came from afar. She then recalled APFNet's formal launch in September 2008, after its proposal agreed by APEC leaders the previous year. She indicated that their decision served as testimony to the region's commitment to sustainable forest management as a means to achieve socio-economic development and mitigate the effects of climate change. With financial support from China, Australia, the United States of America, and The Nature Conservancy, a number of economies, international organizations and academic institutions are actively engaging in APFNet's activities related to capacity building, information exchange, regional policy dialogues and demonstration projects. She further noted that, although China contributes about 4 million US dollars per year to support the work of APFNet, other regional economies and partners also provide much needed assistance. She stated that the time has come to enhance the participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process that guides APFNet's future development to meet the needs of the region. As an advisory body, the Interim Steering Committee has a critical role to play in this regard. Current members are Australia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Viet Nam, the United States, FAO regional office for Asia and the Pacific, and The Nature Conservancy. In closing, Ms. Yin Hong expressed confidence that, with the active involvement of all delegates, the meeting will achieve positive outcomes.

Mr. Qu Guilin then invited Mr. Philip Antweiler, Deputy Director of the US Department of State, to address the group. He was pleased to join discussions among a broad range of colleagues and considered the establishment of the Interim Steering Committee as an essential step in APFNet's development. He noted that, while the Framework Document provided a good starting point for identifying priorities, the need for a more strategic approach and for an advisory body to guide future direction was becoming increasingly clear. Mr. Ben Mitchell, Manager of Australia's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, thanked the hosts for convening the meeting and congratulated the APFNet Secretariat for its hard work to date. He regarded the efforts of the team to

promote multi-functions that forests provide in terms of socio-economic development as real proof of APFNet's desire to make a positive difference in the region.

Composition of Interim Steering Committee and election of chair

Mr. Qu Guilin listed the current composition of the Interim Steering Committee and, in the absence of comments from the group, considered it duly constituted. He then invited nominations for the position of chair. With the unanimous consent of members, Ms. Yin Hong was appointed. In her acceptance speech, she expressed her gratitude for their support and trust, noting that the advice of the committee was crucial in this early stage of APFNet's development, especially in terms of defining its operational structure, guiding its future direction and assisting its work to achieve its objectives, purposes and mission. She promised to fulfill her responsibilities to the best of her ability and respect the principles of multi-stakeholder participation, equal partnership, and consensus based consultations. She also indicated that, with the strong support and full collaboration of members, the committee would significantly contribute to the development of APFNet and the forest sector in the region, including by addressing issues of common concern.

Rules of Procedure

Mr. Qu Guilin invited Mr. David Cassells, Senior International Consultant, APFNet Secretariat, to facilitate discussions of the Interim Steering Committee's draft rules of procedure. Mr. Cassells explained that efforts to develop a set of rules reflect a desire on the part of the Secretariat to adopt a more systematic approach to governance and noted that the current version is the result of several rounds of consultations. Following discussions, revisions were adopted incorporating the approved revisions.

Charter of the APFNet

Mr. Qu Guilin noted that the charter for APFNet is grounded in the Framework Document and it outlines the organizational model of APFNet in the future, which needs constructive comments from all stakeholders. He requested members of the Interim Steering Committee to provide feedback to the Secretariat as it refines the document as part of an iterative and long-term process. A new draft will be circulated to members for further discussion at the next meeting.

In addition to the proposals, members raised the following points for the Secretariat's consideration:

The document should call for the least amount of bureaucracy to get the job done, i.e., the minimum degree of rigidity for the Secretariat to be able to perform its functions. Given that APFNet is committed to work through partnerships, there should be no need for it to establish other offices, as suggested in Article I paragraph 4.

Consider renaming the document “operational guidelines” rather than “charter” which goes significantly beyond the Framework Document.
Make a clear distinction between the Expert Panel for project appraisals and the Interim Steering Committee.

* At the meeting of focal points the following day, it was agreed that members would submit written comments on the draft charter to the Secretariat by 30 June 2011.

Strategic Plan 2011-2015

In his introductory remarks, Mr. Cassells explained that the purpose of the strategic plan is to identify key priorities to guide APFNet’s operations so that it can best meet its mission, purpose and objectives. A first draft was produced in September 2010 and reviewed in Beijing and Rome. Based on feedback received, a second version was discussed in New York and Beijing in early 2011 and written comments were submitted shortly thereafter by Cambodia, Indonesia, the United States and individual experts. The Secretariat completed the current version in May 2011.

Given that members of the Interim Steering Committee would again review the document at the meeting of focal points the next day, discussion was brief. In summary, the following points were raised:

General comments:

The strategic plan is an attempt to identify a reasonable number of priorities where APFNet can add value rather than a document that captures all issues that need to be addressed in the region.

As part of the background, the plan should include an environmental analysis to set the context for proposed priorities and activities.

Specific comments:

THE NATURE OF APFNet

APFNet is an initiative of APEC economies (rather than governments of the Asia-Pacific region) to enhance capacity building and information exchange...

Openness and participation

Need to specify the nature of participation, i.e., in what activities (TNC to provide wording)

Make reference to sub-national and local levels as well

KEY THEMATIC PRIORITIES 2011-2015

Add reference to climate change in this section so that it is more consistent with the vision and mission statements

Enhancing the socio-economic benefits of forests

3rd paragraph: include reference to corporate responsibility and the growing importance of eco-tourism, especially with regard to payments for environmental services

Supporting regional policy dialogues

4th paragraph: add the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission/Forestry Week to the list of platforms to mobilize the involvement of high-level officials

Demonstration projects

4th paragraph, 4th bullet: change “community-based development” to “community-based forest management/enterprise development”

Closing remarks

Mr. Qu Guilin closed the meeting by thanking members for their active participation and expressing his gratitude to Mr. Cassells for his excellent facilitation of discussions. He stressed that their help was essential if economies in the region are to increase forest cover by 2020 to improve the conditions of people and communities who rely on forest resources for their livelihoods and well-being. He further stated that the guidance they give to APFNet will determine the speed at which progress can be made.